

Light ... on a New World

LEVEL
ONE

PROCESSED

MAR 22 1994

GTU LIBRARY

1357

Published for the Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia by



*Light Bible Publications,
Mr J. Cordial, 15 Wilton Drive, Ditton,
Kent ME20 6PL, England*

EDITOR

*Colin Dryland, 116 Greenvale Road,
Eltham, London SE9 1PF, England.*

CORRESPONDENCE EDITOR

*Peter Webb, Orchard Croft, 3 Kings Acre,
Otham, Maidstone, Kent ME15 8UP, England.*

VOLUME THIRTEEN

NUMBER 7

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1994

CONTENTS

One Bible	page 1
Cover Picture	page 6
Incline Thine Ear Unto Wisdom	page 7
Signs of the Times — Editorial	page 15
In the Line of Christ — Bathsheba	page 21

One Bible

'The Origin of Sin and its Consequences'

THERE IS ONLY one Bible; on that, surely all will agree. Those who read these lines may have differing views on what the Bible teaches, and what authority should be accorded to its teaching, who wrote it, and so on. But at least we all recognise a Bible when we see one.

Regular readers will also know that when it comes to believing the Bible, *Light Magazine* nails its colours to the mast. The Bible comes from God, that is our unshakeable conviction, it is His message to us; and we shall find that the message is one, there in one glorious theme which runs right through the book from beginning to end.

Having satisfied ourselves that it comes to us from Almighty God, our part is to listen — and obey. Because it is God speaking and not man, we cannot pick and choose what we like, ignoring what we dislike, as we might with a book of poetry or other writings of men.

Through one of His prophets God said:

'... To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.'¹

God's word is not designed for casual reading. It deals with serious issues and major problems, and it needs to be approached in a responsible way. It is our misfortune to live in a superficial age, an age of flippancy and triviality, when few people seem to allow themselves the time to sit down and really think about where

¹Isaiah 66.2

they are going and where they want to get to at the end. The Bible is the **ONLY BOOK** that can help us with such questions. It offers something which is beyond price and which can be obtained nowhere else.

But the Bible is a big book. Is it possible to summarise its message, to get at the heart of the matter without having to slog through a thousand pages and more of close packed print?

In the long run there is no substitute for reading the Bible and learning its message through individual effort — and the rewards for such effort are great indeed. But an article like this can possibly help you to get started.

How could the Bible's message be summed up in a few words? Well, here is a verse which answers that requirement as well as any:

'For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.'²

We will examine that sentence in some detail and with reference to other verses in the Bible.

SIN THE GREAT ENEMY

Our attention is focused on the great enemy of man — death, and we learn that the reason for this is man's doing — '*by man came death.*' If asked to identify our greatest enemy most of us would probably answer 'Death'. But according to the Bible we would be wrong, for death is the *result*, not the cause. Man dies because he is a sinner, and until he ceases to be a sinner he will continue to be subject to death.

'Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.'³

You will no doubt recognise that this is referring to what happened in the garden of Eden at the beginning. The '*one man*' in this verse is Adam, the first man. He lived under ideal conditions with Eve his wife. There was just one single rule they had to obey, but they managed to break it, and so by disobeying God they became sinners in His sight. The result: they were expelled from the garden, sentenced to die, and while they awaited the day of their death they were to experience pain, hardship and sorrow. And the same troubled experiences were to befall all their children, '*for that all have sinned*'.

That is the simple though sad account the Bible gives us of how it all began. It is true — Jesus himself confirmed its truth;⁴ and it was his mission to put things right again, to remove the evil results of Adam's folly.

'... The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.'⁵

'For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.'⁶

²1 Corinthians 15.21 ³Romans 5.12 ⁴Matthew 19 ⁵1 John 4.14 ⁶Matthew 18.11

THE REALITY OF DEATH

It is important that we face up to the facts of our present situation, hard though it may be to accept them; for if we refuse to acknowledge our helpless position then we rob ourselves of the only help available — the help which God offers us through Jesus Christ.

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'⁷

That well-known and beloved verse tells us that without Christ we are *perishing*. It has been one of the gravest errors of Christendom through the centuries to teach that death is not really the end of us, but simply the gateway to another life. *This is a delusion*. The Bible tells us quite bluntly that death is exactly what it appears to be, the end of life, the just punishment for human sin:

'... the wages of sin is death.'⁸

'... the dead know not anything ... their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished.'⁹

'... the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.'¹⁰

This is the teaching of the Bible throughout, Old and New Testaments, Psalms, Prophets, Gospels and Epistles. Once we have grasped and accepted this, we are in a position to appreciate the love of God in providing an escape route, in the person of His son Jesus Christ.

THE PROMISE OF A SAVIOUR

All through the Old Testament are to be found promises of salvation. Just one example must suffice here. Through one of His prophets God sends this reassuring message:

'... there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.'¹¹

There must have been many godly men and women in Old Testament times who listened to such words as those, and wondered just how this salvation was to be achieved, given man's incorrigible tendency to sin. A little clue to the problem is provided in words that follow in that same chapter just quoted:

'Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come.'¹¹

Righteousness — the opposite of sinfulness; there lies the key. But where could righteousness be found among a race of sinners?

⁷John 3.16 ⁸Romans 6.23 ⁹Ecclesiastes 9.5,6 ¹⁰Isaiah 38.18 ¹¹Isaiah 45.21,22,25

To Israel, God's chosen people, He gave that famous legal code known as the Law of Moses (because it came to them via Moses). It was a good and wise law, designed for their well-being, but — not one of them could keep it! It proved too much even for the best of them. Paul the great apostle lamented his failure:

'For I know that in me [that is, in my flesh], dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not . . .
O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'¹²

Even as he cried out in such despair, Paul knew the answer that swiftly followed: *'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'*¹²

The prophet had declared, *'In the Lord have I righteousness,'* and so in due time God provided the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, God's own Son. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God, and then surrendered that life upon the cross as an offering to God on behalf of mankind. He did not deserve to die, because he was sinless. It was written of him in another prophecy:

' . . . he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.'¹³

The same chapter refers to him as God's *righteous servant*. When Jesus appeared among men, John the Baptist described him as *' . . . the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'*¹⁴

CHRIST'S GREAT VICTORY

Though Jesus died, in obedience to the will of his Father, his perfect righteousness meant that he could not be allowed to remain dead; that would have been unjust. Peter explains this:

' . . . God raised him to life again, setting him free from the pangs of death, because it could not be that death should keep him in its grip.'¹⁵

In this way God provided one who obtained victory over sin and death, and, returning to the quotation made earlier, we see how the equation can now be completed:

' . . . since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.'¹²

Lest there should be the slightest doubt as to who he is speaking about Paul immediately continues:

'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'¹²

Clearly then Christ's triumph is not merely for his own benefit; it is for others to share as well. In the same place Paul speaks of Christ as being *'the firstfruits of them that slept.'* There is a great harvest to be reaped. When Jesus returns to earth

¹²Romans 7.18,24,25 ¹³Isaiah 53.5 ¹⁴John 1.29 ¹⁵Acts 2.24 (N.E.B.)

multitudes will be raised to life again and will share the glories of his kingdom. Not everyone who has ever lived, but *'they that are Christ's at his coming.'*¹⁶ The eternal reward is for those who have become followers of Jesus, believing his word and obeying his precepts. For Christ's sake God is willing to forgive the sins of all such, and they share the fruits of his righteousness. Christ has made possible the fulfilment of the prophet's word, *'Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength.'*¹¹

Jesus had destroyed the power of sin and all its evil consequences. When he appeared to his apostles after his resurrection he said to them:

*'... all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them ...'*¹⁷

Just what that power enables Jesus to do is spelled out by him in that last message of his, the Book of Revelation given to John:

*'I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.'*¹⁸

At the beginning of this article the comment was made that there is one glorious theme which runs right through the Bible. We have now briefly traced that theme through; we have seen that it begins with the fall of man in Genesis and ends with the victory over death being proclaimed in Revelation. That victory can bring life to you, to us all; *'whosoever will'* is the phrase on the Bible's last page:

*'... Let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.'*¹⁹

Martin Evans
Reigate

¹⁶1 Corinthians 15.23 ¹⁷Matthew 28.18,19 ¹⁸Revelation 1.18 ¹⁹Revelation 22.17

COVER PICTURE

What a beautiful sky! How often we say this, particularly when viewing the evening sky with its signs for the forthcoming weather. The oft repeated rhyme: '*Red sky at night, shepherd's delight; red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning*' has its basis in meteorological facts, and the **appearance** of the sky can be a useful guide to tomorrow's weather.

However appearances can be deceptive! The picture provided by Clive Rivers could be early morning or **could** be sunset. Which do you think it is?

Jesus said of the religious leaders of the day:

'... hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.'¹

The editorial article for this new year issue of Light on a New World, takes as its title the words used by Jesus, **Signs of the Times**. What **we** need to do is to discern the signs of **our times** and to recognise that what we are seeing today are signs that Christ's return to earth is very near.

¹Matthew 16.3 (NKJV)

Incline Thine Ear Unto Wisdom

*'Train up a child in the way he should go'*¹

MANY THEORIES AND books have been written by well meaning authors offering advice and guidance on bringing up children. As a 'believer' of the Bible the writer of this article seeks to examine the Divine advice, leaving you the reader to apply the principles and instruction to your own particular situation.

It is quite clear from the Bible record that it was God's intention in Creation that there should be marriage and that there should be children. Eve was given to Adam and they were to be parents.

In the first chapter of Genesis God blessed them:

*'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.'*²

A great responsibility is placed upon parents who need to devote unceasing love to bring up a child from the cradle through to adulthood. It is a continuing task and involves responsibilities for the care and development of the young life. For the God fearing parents their primary concern is that their children will be raised so that as adults they will become true servants of God. More than anything else, godly parents should want their children to be in the Kingdom of God and will prayerfully seek the much needed wisdom to help forward this development.

Children are derived and only possible through the power of God, they are His heritage in our care and that realisation should produce an acute awareness of the responsibility every parent has. Parents are custodians of His creation; and He desires that His children be returned to Him, which can only occur if they are trained to walk in His ways.

*'Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord.'*³

¹Proverbs 22.6 ²Genesis 1.28 ³Psalms 127.3

The formative years of a child are a precious but very short period of their total lifespan and much depends on the upbringing they receive at this time from their parents. Each child will have its own individuality and much wisdom will be needed to account for this fact.

ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS

A child learns more by the eye than by the ear, therefore imitation is a far more powerful principle of teaching than memorization. Children are naturally curious and ask questions. This is nothing new *'And it shall come to pass when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service?'*⁴ when they participate in the annual Passover ritual; the adults were expected to have a good reply. Again, it was inevitable that as children grew and saw the dedication of the eldest son they would ask questions. *'What is this?'*⁵ When they did so, the opportunity was to be seized to tell the children about the way God had helped in the past.

The child's mind was open to receive the information and reply; no better time would arise to teach them the Truth. Also no surprise should be shown that the question had been asked but rather anticipating that the topic would be raised at some time the parent should prepare an answer in advance. Do not be caught stammering around with an incomplete or incorrect response for here is a golden opportunity to instruct the child. Remember to pitch your reply to meet the needs of the child at that point in time; satisfy their enquiry with sufficient information which maintains the child's respect for elders and ensures they will come again to pose questions and problems.

Children naturally will continually ask questions about all sorts of things; about everyday activities, about creation, about the reason for obedience, about wrong ideas they hear, about their bodies. If we provide them with sound supportable answers they will ask and ask again. If we respond with vague generalities, or put them off to another time they will gradually stop asking because our answers do not satisfy them. Sometimes we will not know the explanation, but if we study it out and come back with an answer, the child will be encouraged to ask again.

Further Bible examples of this principle are found in Joshua and Joel:

*'Pass over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.'*⁶

³Psalm 127.3 ⁴Exodus 12.26 ⁵Exodus 13.14 ⁶Joshua 4.5-7

'Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.'⁷

DUTY ON PARENTS TO TEACH

The Bible places an obligation on parents to reach out and onwards to the next generation:

'Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;⁸

'And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.'⁹

'Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.'¹⁰

It is the responsibility of parents to teach their children in the hope that when they grow older they will understand what being a good citizen means. They will then be useful not only to themselves but also make a valued contribution to the society in which they are placed. *'Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.'*¹¹

It was for this excellent quality that God chose Abraham to be the father of a great nation in whom the future hope of the human race lies:

'For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.'¹²

In the passages already quoted from Psalms 78 & 34 we are given a list of things we ought not to hide from our children:

'The praises of the Lord'
'His strength'
'His wonderful works'
The need 'to set their hope in God'
To 'keep his commandments'
'The fear of the Lord'

⁷Joel 1.3 ⁸Deuteronomy 4.9 ⁹Deuteronomy 6.6,7 ¹⁰Psalms 78.1-7 ¹¹Psalms 34.11

¹²Genesis 18.19

These were the things taught to Timothy and it was these that made him wise unto salvation:

'When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.'¹³

'But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.'¹⁴

The Bible places considerable stress on the greatness and wonder of God and to hide these very positive aspects from our children would be failing in our duty to train up a child in the way it should go.

In the passage quoted from the letter the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy he acknowledges that his son in the faith, Timothy, not only knew a number of stories, but that he knew the Holy Scriptures. This implies that as he grew up he became increasingly familiar with the Old Testament as a whole. This should be our example that progressively we train our children through such opportunities as Sunday Schools and home learning to become familiar with the teaching of all parts of the Bible.

HAVING CHILDREN AROUND US

The greatest teacher of all time was Jesus Christ, who although denied the experiences of parenthood, grew up and was educated in a family environment with brothers and sisters. There is a family feeling surrounding his birth but we have to use our imagination to picture his life with Joseph in the workshop and around the home with Mary as he grew up. Jesus had time for children. He observed and warmed to the natural trust and readiness to believe in young children, their capacity for obedience, their wish to please, their enthusiasm, their innocence.

'And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them. And said. Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'

'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.'¹⁵

'Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'¹⁶

¹³II Timothy 1.5 ¹⁴II Timothy 3.14-17 ¹⁵Matthew 18.2-4,10 ¹⁶Matthew 19.14

We should want to have children around us because we can all learn something from them. There is much to be said for children growing up to view all of their associates as an extended family and where appropriate to address elders as "aunts and uncles", such close ties will stand them in good stead during the more turbulent years of adolescence.

HOW CAN WE TRAIN AND TEACH?

Human beings have basic needs which may be summed up as follows:

Need	I should
To be appreciated	Spend time with them talking about their interests
To participate	Find things for them to do and let them contribute
To have insight	Explain why we do certain things

If these conditions can be met then the child will come to feel it is wanted and cared for, it will be encouraged to play its own part in the proceedings and will be drawn into the trainer's confidence. This will support and help learning and follows the wisdom explained in the Bible.

THE ART OF STORY TELLING

All the world loves a story and most children will come close to you to hear a good tale. This is a golden opportunity because not only will they listen; they can learn from a story as well. Jesus was the master story teller; his extensive use of parables which were '*earthly stories with heavenly meanings*' are well known. The stories were simple and about 40 are recorded in the Bible. The example of the Prodigal Son is a masterpiece of Divine wisdom at teaching the important lessons for all subsequent generations of children to learn from.

Children will need to be able to relate to any story if they are to learn from them so the starting point must commence with something within their experience. As the story develops it must remain feasible and related to the listener but at the same time ensure that the lesson gains full emphasis.

The final point to bear in mind in using a story is the need to realise any difficulties that may be in the child's mind. For instance, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus set the scene within familiar circumstances of home life. Then as the story unfolds the graphic picture of his abject misery among the pigs leaves a lasting impression of the depths to which he had sunk. By contrast the climax of the story with all the details of the welcome home by the eagerly watching after with his readiness to forgive is contrasted with the hard heartedness of the elder brother who is shown up in its true colours. The whole point of the story is inescapable and provides a model of training for us all to try and copy.¹⁷

¹⁷Luke 15.11-32

THE BIBLE VIEW OF DISCIPLINE

We are left in no doubt as to the inspired viewpoint on this matter. The Bible is realistic and unapologetic: *'Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.'*¹⁸

The New Testament quotes words found in another part of the Proverbs:

*'And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.'*¹⁹

The idea is emphasised again with a warning against going to extremes:

*'And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nature and admonition of the Lord.'*²⁰

Children will feel secure in a structured and disciplined environment. Provided the boundaries are understood and can be justified then young people will generally be prepared to respect and follow a good and consistent example being set. Good discipline depends on right relationships between the child and the trainer and all teachers and parents should try to ensure that by their personality and example respect and friendship will develop.

WHAT IS LOVE?

With all the active and vigorous qualities required in training up a child we must not overlook the need to like children for their own sake. To be able to enjoy children's company and conversation, to be truly interested in their interests and to feel a respect for them as individual personalities requires wisdom on the part of the adult. Such qualities will show themselves in a desire and readiness to spend time with them and to enjoy sharing activities with them.

It is no use pretending that we love them if deep down we have a query in our hearts. *'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.'*²¹ *'Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it.'*²² This is the true model of Christian love. All trainers who show this level of love to children will always be loved by them.

This was the way in which the great Apostle Paul communicated the Gospel message in the first century:

*'We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us . . . ye know now how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.'*²³

¹⁸Proverbs 22.15 ¹⁹Hebrews 12.5,6 cited from Proverbs 3.11,12 ²⁰Ephesians 6.4 ²¹John 3.16 ²²Ephesians 5.25 ²³1 Thessalonians 2.7-12

It is not easy — nobody ever said it would be; but by listening to the voice of wisdom and trying to put it into practise we will gain great satisfaction in seeing children being brought up in a good way which will be to their ultimate benefit.

Jesus said:

'As ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'²⁴

M. Fisher
Haywards Heath

²⁴Matthew 25.40

ADVICE FOR PARENTS FROM PROVERBS

REASONS FOR GOOD PARENTING

Proverbs 10.1

'A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.'

Proverbs 17.25

'A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.'

Proverbs 19.13

'A foolish son is the calamity of his father.'

Proverbs 23.24

'The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him.'

Proverbs 29.3

'Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father.'

POSSIBLE TO GAIN GOOD RESULTS

Proverbs 22.6

'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.'

GOOD TRAINING NEEDED

Proverbs 4.3,4

'I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live.'

Proverbs 6.20-23

'My son, keep thy father's commandments, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.'

DISCIPLINE REQUIRED

Proverbs 3.12

'For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.'

Proverbs 13.24

'He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes'

Proverbs 19.18

'Casten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.'

Proverbs 22.15

'Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.'

Proverbs 23.13,14

'Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.'

Proverbs 29.15,17

'The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.'

'Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.'

GOOD PARENTS

Proverbs 20.7

'The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.'

Sign of the Times

— Editorial

AS WE CROSS the threshold of the new year, it is surely an opportune moment to look back at the events of the old year, before we consider what the future might hold. 1993 has been a year of surprises. Who would have thought, for example, that the leader of Israel and the head of the P.L.O. would have shaken hands in Washington in a gesture of friendship on the White House lawns, and that the whole world would see it? Who would have thought that the other 'white house' in Moscow would have been wrecked by tank shells in the abortive coup against Boris Yeltsin?

Should we be surprised? Students of Biblical prophecy are not quite so surprised by events such as we have seen in 1993 and no doubt, will see in this new year of 1994. Bible prophecy, fulfilled and still fulfilling today, provides the serious student with the most exciting evidence that the world is in God's control. What we are seeing in social and political life right across the world, is inescapable evidence that God's plan is advancing to its triumphant conclusion!

God's plan is to save the world! The Bible, which is the only authentic source of information about that plan, tells us that God will send Jesus Christ back to the earth to set up His Kingdom. This is the consistent message of both old and new Testaments. The prophet Daniel, for example:

'And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.'¹

If you are a regular reader of this magazine, you will know that '*these kings*' referred to by Daniel were nothing to do with his own times. They are kings or rulers

N.B. All references in this article are taken from the New King James Bible Scofield version by Thomas Nelson Publishers. ¹*Daniel 2.44 (NKJV)*

who would rule on the earth at a time after the succession of great empires had long passed off the scene — Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. In fact, the circumstances prevailing at the time of God's intervention in world affairs was well-described by Daniel in this 2nd chapter of his prophecy. The succession of kingdoms is described by a great image, seen first in vision by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. Daniel, given the knowledge by God, explains what the various parts of the image mean. God intervenes in the kingdoms of men, not at a time when they are cohesive and strong, but when there is disarray and disharmony — no one great nation calling the tune, as in Daniel's times! God intervenes at the end of the image's life, when it is supported precariously by the feet and toes:

'And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.'²

The four great empires have long gone and today we see exactly what Nebuchadnezzar saw. No dominant world empire. Great Britain, no longer great, no longer with an extensive empire and even Australia, once regarded as one of the '*young lions*', possibly seeking independence from the Monarchy. The U.S.S.R. is no more, its constituent parts now independent states under the umbrella of the Commonwealth of Independent States — a very similar situation as applies to the U.K. and the Commonwealth.

America remains an independent power in the world, though its influence abroad seems somewhat diminished. The '*trade war*' that could so easily break out between America and Europe, constantly occupies the minds of politicians. G.A.T.T., the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade is yet to be agreed at the time of writing. Maastricht is now a ratified treaty and yet how greatly weakened it is by comparison with the hopes of men like M. Jacques Delors. Monetary union is unlikely for some time to come and seems to many to be a portent for dis-unity in the future. **Fragmentary evidence?** Yes, but it all adds up to the description in the Bible of the time when God will interfere in man's affairs.

So, although 1993 held surprises for some people, in reality the scenario is as expected in the time of the end. Just as iron and ceramic clay will not bond firmly together, so the nations, and especially those in Europe, Asia and Africa cannot find either unity or lasting peace. Wars rage across the globe. Former Yugoslavia is torn to shreds and wars flicker across Africa. In the Far East, China squabbles over Hong Kong and the seeds of conflict are there in Korea.

The social scene is hardly a comforting one! In England, the Conservative ruling party is targeting the social evils it perceives as the great threat to the United Kingdom. More prisons are being built and guns and explosives threaten every

²Daniel 2.42,43 (NKJV)

inhabitant of the land. In Northern Ireland the interminable terrorist conflict drags on and each month, innocent men, women and children are slaughtered. **Signs of OUR times?**

Now, the disciples of Jesus knew quite a lot about the plan of God to establish His Kingdom upon the earth. They had, after all, spent more than three years with Jesus as he preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and urged repentance. Towards the end of his ministry, they asked Jesus for signs of the coming kingdom, little realising the time scale involved:

‘... Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’³

They knew the good news (Gospel) of the kingdom would be through God’s purpose with Israel. When would it be? Christ told them that only God knew the day or the hour, and that in the meantime they were to continue in the work of the Gospel. They did ask him earlier:

‘... Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’⁴

The signs that Jesus gave concerned Israel and the political and social circumstances of the “time of the end”. **That is why Bible students are not surprised by what they see in the world TODAY!**

So, what do we see? What we see is described by Jesus:

‘And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars: and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heaven will be shaken.’⁵

Yes, there have been many signs in the political heavens, in the ranks of those who rule over the earth. Honest politicians struggle with intransigent and in some cases, corrupt world leaders. Throughout the world there is distress on a vast scale, whether it be in Eastern Europe, Africa or Asia. The word that Christ used and which we have translated into the English word PERPLEXITY, means *no way out* — what an accurate description of the times we live in! The sea of nations roars in tumult and at the root of it all is the Biblical truth expressed by the prophets of the Old Testament:

‘But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. “There is no peace,” Says my God, “for the wicked”.’⁶

Failure to acknowledge Almighty God lies at the root of all man’s troubles, be they political or social. Christ described the social circumstances which will prevail when he returns to the earth. They are described like this:

³Acts 1.6 (NKJV) ⁴Matthew 24.3 (NKJV) ⁵Luke 21.25,26 (NKJV) ⁶Isaiah 57.20,21 (NKJV)

'But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.'⁷

What is wrong with eating and drinking and getting married? Nothing at all, if it is done with obedience to the commands of God! BUT, divorce, adultery, fornication, blasphemy, fraud and deceit — these are the characteristics of the world of today, just as they were in Noah's day! Don't take **our** word for that — consider the description in Genesis chapter 6!

'Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.'⁸

The facets of human nature that the Conservative Party are trying to overcome in their policy of '*Back to Basics*' are those which God chose to destroy in the times of Noah. Unwittingly, they are drawing to our attention that the world is in the state described by Christ as being a sign of his early return to the earth.

SIGNS OF OUR TIMES!

The astonishing sight of former sworn enemies shaking hands together, however hesitatingly, brings to our attention yet another evidence, or sign of the times we are in. Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi in London, noted the Biblical overtones of the event. So did President Clinton of the U.S.A. He said that the peace accord between Israel and the P.L.O. was the latest chapter in the drama of the children of Abraham, the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael. Yitzak Rabin, who is a secular rather than a religious Jew, quoted from Israel's past history — a history that has inevitably been linked with the descendants of Ishmael who, though also descended from Abraham, have nonetheless been the long-standing enemies of God's people. His purpose was to underline the weeping that has prevailed on both sides as a direct result of war, and he quoted from the Old Testament Prophets to make his point.

Observers of the scene have been moved to ask: what made Yitzak Rabin take this risk of signing a peace accord with Yasser Arafat? He has started the process of making peace with a group of Arabs who have no tradition of either moderation or peace. He has shaken hands with a man previously dedicated to violence and terror, who, on one occasion, addressed the United Nations Assembly with a gun at his hand. What the outcome will be in the short term is difficult to predict. The long term outcome is the subject of Biblical prophecy:

⁷Matthew 24.37-39 (NKJV) ⁸Genesis 6.5 (NKJV)

'Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold your peace, and do not be still, O God! For behold, your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more".'⁹

Who are these who speak so with violence in mind? In the rest of the 83rd Psalm, we are told who: Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarenes. You may not recognise these names today, but they are the forbears of the Arabs, and especially of the Jordanians, the Syrians and the Palestinian peoples. It is these who Yitzak Rabin has joined in a peace treaty. Psalm 83 indicates that in the end, it will be war and not peace, which will decide the issue:

'Let them be confounded and dismayed for ever; Yes, let them be put to shame and perish, That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth.'¹⁰

So, at a time when efforts are being made to establish a home for the Palestinian people, the Bible tells us that the outcome will not be satisfactory until God intervenes, in the person of Jesus Christ. It is ironic that the one who will bring ultimate peace and was crucified by the people he will come to save, is accepted by many who oppose Israel today. It is human of us to wish that peace could come to ALL the world's battlefields and those who have been displaced might find a home, but unless it is of God, every device of man is doomed to fail.

One Jew, who in the first instance was the enemy of Christ, had his eyes opened to serve him, and became the great Apostle to the Gentiles — Paul, of course! He wrote to the early Christian believers about the signs of the times:

'BUT concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say "Peace and safety", then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labour pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.'¹¹

Are we witnessing this cry for peace and safety? Israel and Egypt some years ago, controversially signed a peace accord. Syria has made encouraging remarks about peace over the Golan Heights, and now we have Israel and the P.L.O. talking of peace and security.

MORE SIGNS OF OUR TIMES!

Christ said that men's hearts would be failing them from fear. There is nothing more fearful than an earthquake, and we have had a steady occurrence of earthquakes, some of them devastating. India in September and Japan in October. Earlier in the year, California once again. Jesus foretold of a time when there would

⁹Psalm 83.1-4 (NKJV) ¹⁰Psalm 83.17,18 (NKJV) ¹¹1 Thess. 5.1-3 (NKJV)

be '*. . . great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.*'¹² Now, we must be wary of saying that Jesus meant literal earthquakes, especially as the symbology used here is linked with the rulers of the political heavens, the sun, moon and stars. However, God has used earthquakes in the past to draw attention to His purpose, and who would be so brave as to deny that He will not use them in the future?

There is a well-known earth fault known as the Great Rift Valley. It runs from Armenia, down through Israel into Africa through Egypt, Tanzania and Malawi. The Bible predicts that there will be a great earthquake in Jerusalem which will mark the furtherance of God's plan for His people and for the world, when Jesus sets up in the capital city of the Kingdom of God, a house of prayer for all nations. The Great Rift Valley lies dormant at the time of writing: might it not be, like the seeking for peace and safety between Arab and Jew, the calm before the storm? The prophet Zechariah said:

'BEHOLD, the day of the LORD is coming . . . For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem . . . Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west . . . making a very large valley.'¹³

Needless to say, the Mount of Olives and the city of Jerusalem sit plum upon the fault line of the Great Rift Valley!

So, surprises there were in 1993, but could 1994 have the biggest surprise of all, so far as the world at large is concerned? The second coming of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God WILL catch the majority unawares. Christ said so and his warning to all his hearers is plainly written:

'But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.'¹⁴

Surely, the Signs of Our Times say to all of us who are watching, **'TAKE HEED'!**

David Evans,
Sidcup, Kent

¹²Luke 21.11 (NKJV) ¹³Zech. 14.1-4 (NKJV) ¹⁴Luke 21.34-36 (NKJV)

In the Line of Christ — Bathsheba

THE GENEALOGIES of Christ given in the New Testament, although incomplete, include the names of four women, and each of the four forms a somewhat unusual link in the chain of people who were the legal ancestors of Christ. The four women are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba.

Tamar's son was conceived through an incestuous relationship with her father-in-law; Rahab was a gentile prostitute; Ruth bore her children by Boaz who married her to fulfil his obligations to her dead husband under the "near kinsman" provisions of the Law of Moses; and Bathsheba became part of the chain as a result of her adulterous relationship with King David of Israel, a relationship which led to the murder of her husband Uriah. Because of this, in Matthew's record of Christ's genealogy Bathsheba is not mentioned by name; instead she is described as '*her that had been the wife of Uriah*'. In this article we are to consider Bathsheba in more detail.

The first reference in the Bible to Bathsheba is in II Samuel chapter 11. David had sent the Israelite armies against Rabbah the capital city of the Ammonites who were longstanding enemies of Israel. David himself remained in Jerusalem, leaving the battle under the command of a number of senior officers, one of whom was Uriah the Hittite and the husband of Bathsheba. Uriah is included in the list of David's bravest and strongest soldiers found in II Samuel chapter 23. It is interesting to note in passing that Bathsheba's grandfather may have been Ahithophel the Gilonite, one of David's wisest and most trusted advisers.

Bathsheba, we are told, was a very beautiful woman. As an army wife she was doubtless well used to long periods of solitude, perhaps even loneliness, when her husband was away with the Israelite army. On the particular occasion we are to consider she seems to have acted rather indiscreetly by washing herself late one afternoon in the courtyard of her house where it was at least possible that she would be seen by others. She was in fact observed by king David of Israel himself as he strolled on the rooftop of his palace, and he was fascinated and tempted by what he

saw. Immediately he sent one of his servants to find out who the lady was. Upon learning that she was Uriah's wife, and knowing that her husband was away with the army and would not return home for many days, David decided to invite Bathsheba to his palace. It seems clear that his intentions were not honourable. It was a foolish move; he should have known better than to tangle with the wife of one of his officers and possibly the granddaughter of his chief adviser.

Neither he nor Bathsheba behaved sensibly. By inviting her to the palace David fed his temptation and put himself in a dangerous position; in accepting it, Bathsheba probably knew what the result was going to be, and presumably she was prepared to satisfy David's desires. What was her position? Why had she apparently exposed herself so blatantly? Was she deliberately seeking an affair with the king, or with anybody else? And what about David? Why did he so easily fall prey to the temptation that she presented? We do not know the answers to these questions, but we do know that that very same night Bathsheba and David committed adultery as a result of which she became pregnant. The record in the Bible makes it abundantly clear that Bathsheba was with child as a result of her association with David and that there was no possibility that Uriah, her husband, was the father.

We do not know whether Bathsheba and David formed a continuing friendship; the inference is that they did not but that, after their brief encounter, they resumed their separate lives. But panic set in when Bathsheba realised that she was going to have a baby. Since it was indisputable that her condition was the result of adultery both she and David were punishable by death. The so-called 'Law of Moses', which was in reality the Law of God, provided very clearly that *'If a man commits adultery with another man's wife . . . both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death'*.¹ This was a compulsory punishment.

At this stage in the narrative there are no indications that either Bathsheba or David were sorry for what they had done. There seems to be only a cold calculated planning exercise designed to ensure that they would never be found out. Bathsheba notified David of her condition and he immediately sent word to Joab, the captain of his army, telling him to send Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, home for a while. The pretext was that David wished to have knowledge of the battle's progress from someone who had actually been at the front line. Speed, of course, was of the essence in the plan that David had worked out. His objective was to give Uriah and Bathsheba some time in which to relax together; he wanted them to spend a night in each other's company so that everyone would assume that the child to be born was indeed Uriah's. Bathsheba would willingly and probably eagerly, have played her part in this deception had she been given the opportunity. But her and David's dishonourable behaviour was not to be so easily pushed to one side. Their scheme was thwarted by the integrity and honour of Uriah himself.

¹Leviticus 20.10

Although David had sent Uriah home to his wife with a present of food Uriah was too fair-minded to allow himself to relax and enjoy himself, even for a short period, while his fellow officers and the King's soldiers were still at war and with their lives at risk. So, instead of spending the evening, and the night, with Bathsheba he slept at the palace gates.

David had to think again! His next ploy was to invite Uriah to dinner at the palace on the following day. It seems slightly out of character that Uriah not only accepted the invitation but drank so much of the wine freely offered to him by David that he became drunk. Not so drunk, though, that he went home that night as David had hoped. He spent another night at the palace gates. Could it be that Uriah had rumbled what was going on and that he was determined not to go along with the wicked schemes of his wife and the King; that he was determined that their sin should be exposed?

Having been foiled again, David implemented plan three. He sent Uriah back to the battlefield with a message from David to Joab. In fact he was carrying his own death warrant for the message instructed Joab *'to put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die.'*² The only course left to Bathsheba and David was to dispose of Uriah once and for all, especially as the passing of time meant that any other plan was becoming less and less likely to succeed. David had to contrive the position where he and Bathsheba were free to marry whilst there was still time for the unborn child to be regarded as his. Did Bathsheba object to this planned murder of her husband Uriah? Perhaps she was in no position to argue with the King but it is interesting that the Biblical record does not indicate that she attempted to stop David from proceeding. The plan succeeded and so the lust which had led to adultery and on to deceit led on again to murder.

Bathsheba mourned for her husband, but it may have been a mere formality — simply doing what was expected of her — and was likely to have been only for a short period. The official mourning period was probably only seven days. And immediately that period ended Bathsheba moved in with David and became his wife. Their illegitimate child was born in due time but survived for only one week for it was killed by God as a punishment for the sins of its parents.

The Bible gives us very little further information about Bathsheba. We know that she and David had another son — Solomon — and that the royal line of descent ran through him eventually to Jesus Christ. Bathsheba outlived David and was his wife for very many years. We know that David repented very sincerely of the part he had played in seducing her and murdering her husband; and that his genuine contrition was accepted by God. It is unlikely that he would have lived happily with Bathsheba for so many years had she not shared his remorse and equally been

²II Samuel 11.14

forgiven by God. Nevertheless, the magnitude of her sin is evident from that oblique reference to her in Matthew's gospel record, '*David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias [Uriah]*'.

What meaning does Bathsheba's life have for us? We have too little information to be able to form any worthwhile opinion of her. Only a small fraction of her life is recorded. What we do know is that, in essence, she was no different from us. We can probably sympathise with her feelings and her emotions and her temptations and her failings. People like Bathsheba and Tamar and Rahab and Ruth — four of the ancestors of Christ — underline the Apostle Paul's point that Jesus shared our weak, mortal nature with all its proneness to sin. When he wrote to the Hebrews he told them that '*as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Jesus] also himself likewise took part of the same*'; and he went on to say that, in order to fulfil God's purpose, Jesus '*took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham*'. '*In all things [says Paul] it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren*'.³

Because Jesus shared our nature through his human ancestors such as Bathsheba, he shared our feelings and temptations too. He was not immune from the temptation to do wrong. The amazing thing was that, unlike any other man or woman, Jesus was able to resist every single temptation and so conquer sin and its consequence of death. So Paul explains (again in his letter to the Hebrews) that Jesus '*was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*'.⁴ This fact not only made him our saviour but enables him to understand and sympathise and help with our problems. Writes Paul, '*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*'.⁵

Jewish tradition has it that Bathsheba wrote Proverbs chapter 31. Certainly it is appropriate with its advice in verse 3 not to '*spend your strength on women, your vigour on those who ruin kings*'.⁶ Perhaps the main part of that chapter, which speaks of the virtues of the Godly woman, is a pen portrait of Bathsheba in her later life; when the dark days of adultery and deceit and murder were passed and when she had come to fear God and keep his commandments. Perhaps she had truly learned the lesson expressed in verse 30 of that chapter, '*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised*'.⁷

Martin Southgate
Norwood

³Hebrews 2.14,16,17 ⁴Hebrews 4.15 ⁵Hebrews 4.15,16 ⁶Proverbs 31.3 (NIV)

⁷Proverbs 31.30 (NIV)

Published by:
Light Bible Publications, Mr. J. Cordial, 15 Wilton Drive, Ditton,
Kent ME20 6PL, England.